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Sharman at Home

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One night several years ago, Bill Sharman, a back-court basketballer who thinks and acts like a front-court man, found himself in an unaccustomed position—under his own basket.

He uncorked a 78-ft. pass to teammate Bob Cousy. He missed Cousy, which wasn't unusual, but he made a basket—which wasn't unusual, either. Cousy sighed: "Sharm," he observed, "never was much of a play-maker."

Since that night, Bill Sharman made quite a few baskets on purpose. He became, in fact, a most valuable player on the most valuable franchise in basketball, the Boston Celtics. He set a free-throw record for one season that still stands—over 93% of his foul shots swished through. He considered it an off-night if one of them so much as touched the rim on the way through and at one time dumped 56 in a row through the lacings.

Bill was also a gunner from mid-court. Cousy handled the ball; Sharman handled the baskets.

One of the best natural athletes ever turned out at the University of Southern California in the period of 1946-1950 when he broke a Hank Luisetti single-season scoring record that had stood for 13 years, Sharm was only slightly better at basketball than he was at baseball and for half-a-dozen years as a Brooklyn farm-hand he tried to fit both in. He was gone from home so much the dog bit him when he returned.

He batted over .290 in every league he was ever in and, in 1951, the Brooks called him up to "rest Duke Snider for the World Series." It so happened Duke didn't need the rest because he spent the World Series in front of a TV set—watching the Giants play it.

Sharman Had Unique Distinction

But Sharman was riding the bench the day ump Frank Dascoli cleared it after a fiery fight with Roy Campanella, Jackie Robinson and assorted hotheads in Brooklyn uniforms. Sharman holds the unique distinction of having been thrown out of a major league baseball game without ever having played in one.

He was never big, just good. He finally had to throw in with basketball. It was either that or get a rabies shot every time he packed to go home. Besides, being understudy to Duke Snider looked like a slow way to get in the record book.

He never embarrassed anybody on the basketball floor, either, except possibly the guy assigned to guard him. He threw in 23 points a game on a squad that had so many gunners no one had to play more than half a game.

He jumped the Celts in a noisy fight with owner Walter Brown when the new American Basketball League was founded. Bill didn't necessarily want to go to a new league. He wanted to go back to his old state—California. He had a beautiful home near Boston with a gorgeous big picture window but every time he looked out of it the view was snow.

The ABL lasted about as long as a baby's first set of trains. The games were usually the best-kept secrets in town and it seemed a shame to wake everybody up to go home. They had a three-point basket but the act never would have gotten out of Sheboygan in the old days. They still owe Bill two years' salary but he isn't ordering any yachts.

Took Over Group of Midgets

Sharm took the coaching job at L.A. State, where a fun-loving character named Sax Elliot had put in such innovations as padding in the soles of the shoes of his team in the past. When Bill got a load of the squad, he saw why. There wasn't a one of them that had to duck under a door. In fact, a few of them could act as chimney sweeps.

Willie Love is only 5 ft. 4 in. The tallest man on the team would spend the night staring at Wilt Chamberlain's belt buckle. But they were dust-raisers. Half the squad was under 6 ft. but they kept the other team's tongues hanging out. When they get their hands on the ball, which isn't often enough, the court looks like the Olympic tryouts.

Their free-throw percentage is what makes Bill's eyes brim from time to time. The 93 per cent shooter has a team with a 33 per cent average. But Sharm, who gave up, in addition to Boston, a sausage factory, driving range and assorted other business interests to come home, is not sorry.

"It's fun. We'll get a program going. We're a new school. I'm a new coach." When Sharm left L.A., the nearest major league was at the Mississippi River. Now it's at the Pacific Ocean and L.A. is glad to have its own major leaguer, Bill Sharman, back, too.

Track Champions Due Back for Times Meet

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